

District 2 Town Meeting
Wednesday, September 5, 2012
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
16th and Perkiomen Ave.
6:30 pm

Attending: M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, C. Snyder, C. Jones, UGI Representatives, L. Kelleher and approximately 90 citizens

Pastor Kehler made some welcoming remarks and gave an invocation.

Mr. Jenks, Co-Chair of the 16th and Haak Neighborhood Watch encouraged those attending to participate in the Neighborhood Watch meetings held the 1st Wednesday of each month at 6:30 at the church.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz introduced the City officials and UGI representatives attending. She stated that the meeting will focus on the UGI gas meters, the repaving of Cotton Street, the proposed renaming of Cotton Street, and other matters identified by citizens.

UGI Gas Meters

Tim Angstadt, UGI representative, explained that UGI is working to evaluate their existing facilities and infrastructure and making upgrades where needed. He stated that underground gas mains are being replaced, along with the laterals, which then requires the gas meters to be relocated to the outside of properties. This project was caused by gas explosions that have occurred in the broader UGI family.

A citizen inquired why historic districts are treated differently. Mr. Angstadt stated that historic districts are approved by the City. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that people with questions about the location of historic districts call the Council Office at 610 655 6204.

A citizen questioned the new public safety issues presented by the installation of gas meters that extend beyond the façade of the home directly into the public right of way. Mr. Angstadt stated it is safer to have the meters outside than inside. He noted that the exterior meters allow the gas to be immediately disconnected if the meter is damaged.

A citizen expressed the belief that the meters detract from the appearance of homes and buildings and will reduce the value of properties.

Ms. Snyder stated that the City has brought the concerns addressed by citizens and City Council to UGI and UGI has agreed to revisit the design of the external meters. She explained the process used by the PaPUC and UGI to select and test utility meters. She stated that UGI

is exploring flush mount and smaller gas meters.

A citizen inquired if City Council was made aware of the move to place gas meters on the outside of properties. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and Ms. Snyder stated that Council was not aware until the meters began to appear on the exterior of properties.

A citizen inquired if the City approved or authorized UGI to relocate the meters. Mr. Jones stated that the City has no control over UGI or any other utility provider.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz introduced Council President Francis Acosta.

Mr. Angstadt stated that UGI is relocating the meters to the exterior of properties to comply with a pending PaPUC regulation that is expected to become law sometime in 2013.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that after the meters began to appear on the exterior of properties she learned through our State legislators that the City has no control over the relocation of the meters and the requirement, when approved, will go into effect State-wide. She stated that this is similar to the electrical utility's placement of electric poles, wires, etc.

Becky Eshbach, representing UGI, distributed photos of alternative gas meters and examples of how people have disguised their gas meters after they were relocated to the exterior of a property.

Mr. Acosta stated that Council is addressing this city-wide problem. He described Council's recent discussion with UGI representatives. He stated that City Council agrees with the concerns residents have expressed and they are deeply concerned about the public safety risks as the meters extend too far into the public right of way and create a serious trip hazard. He expressed the belief that this issue will take time to settle.

Mr. Angstadt explained that letters were sent to property owners informing them of the need to relocate the meters. However, Council or the City was not informed. A citizen noted that the letters sent by UGI do not provide an expected project date. He inquired if information is available on the UGI website about where and when projects will occur. Ms. Eshbach stated that the UGI website does not contain project information and that citizens can call her directly with questions.

A citizen complained that the meter at his home was relocated to the exterior; however, other gas customers in his block did not have their meters relocated. He expressed the belief that property owners should have some say in the style and location of the meters, as the property owner will be liable if someone is injured by a meter that extends into the public right of way.

A citizen inquired why UGI could not use the style of meters used by RAWA, as these meters are located in the pit, rather than on the exterior of the home. He expressed the belief that the antiquated appearance of the meters detract from the appearance of homes.

Mr. Angstadt stated that the upgrade of the underground gas mains have increased the gas pressure. This new increased pressure cannot be handled by the interior meters. He stated that moving the meters outside will allow the gas service to automatically disconnect when the meter becomes damaged.

A citizen expressed the belief that the exterior meters expending into the public right of way will create an attractive nuisance and will be targeted by vandals.

A citizen inquired if UGI will be responsible for replacing the curb and sidewalk damaged by the project. Another citizen suggested that the City seek an injunction to stop this project.

Mr. Angstadt explained the rationale behind the relocation of the meters to the exterior and explained that UGI must replace/repair the street, curb and sidewalk surfaces that are damaged through this and other projects.

A citizen noted that in East Reading, many blocks only have parking on one side of the street. She noted that loss of parking during the project for an extended period of time will be problematic for residents, especially those who need to utilize handicapped parking spaces. Ms. Eshbach suggested calling the UGI office to make arrangements prior to the start of the project.

A citizen stated that while the relocation of the meters is to become a state-wide issue, UGI failed to consider urban conditions before selecting this type of meter. He noted that while these meters will work in neighborhoods where the home has moderate set-back, they will not work in areas that do not, such as Cotton Street.

In response to a question, Mr. Jones stated that the meters selected extend three feet into the public right of way. The citizen noted that in many urban neighborhoods the sidewalks are less than three feet wide.

A resident stated that UGI needs to only relocate the gas regulator to allow the immediate shut off of the gas if there is damage to the gas line. Mr. Angstadt stated that the PaPUC will not allow UGI to relocate only the regulator. He again noted that UGI is attempting to get ahead of the expected PaPUC ruling about the replacement of aging infrastructure and the move of meters to the exterior of properties.

Mr. Angstadt stated that one block of Cotton Street will be unaffected, as this gas main was

replaced after an explosion that occurred in the 1970's.

Repaving of Cotton Street

Mr. Jones stated that any utility company who disrupts paving is required to repair the area, including a one foot perimeter. He stated that due to the size of the Cotton Street project, the City decided to repave all of Cotton Street, not only the side affected by the UGI project. He stated that UGI contributed a portion of the paving project cost and the remaining funding will be covered by Liquid Fuels Funds (allocated to municipalities in Pennsylvania from the State gas tax) from the 900 through the 1900 blocks of Cotton Street. He stated that due to the cost, the City cannot begin the project until 2013, as the City's portion will require the allocation of funds from the 2012-13 Liquid Fuels funds.

A clear majority of citizens attending the meeting objected to waiting this long for the repair of Cotton Street. They expressed the belief that they are not being treated fairly.

A citizen stated that Reading Police regularly issue tickets to vehicles on Cotton Street for driving in the wrong lane of traffic; however, he stated that people drive on the wrong side when they can to avoid driving over the "washboard" like paving. He stated that when citizens appeal these tickets to his MDJ courtroom, he regularly dismisses them.

Mr. Jones explained the legal uses for Liquid Fuels funds. He stated that these funds can be used for street paving, snow plowing, equipment such as service trucks, salt, street lighting, electric for street lighting, etc.

Mr. Jones stated that the City is not resurfacing Cotton Street, but is milling and repaving the street, replacing damaged curbing, including replacing existing slate curbing. He stated that CDBG funding will be used to pay for the curbing project. He stated that the repaving cost is approximately \$500,000 and he explained how that is broken out over two budget years.

Mr. Acosta asked the Managing Director if the City could identify any funding to complete this project in 2012. Ms. Snyder stated that even if the City could cover the cost of the project this year, it is too late in the calendar year to get a bid and get the project started. She noted that paving projects, in general, are not started after October 1.

Mr. Acosta assured the citizens that the project cost will be included in the 2013 budget.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz assured the citizens that she has repeatedly inquired about the repaving of Cotton Street and kept the pressure on the Administration. She agreed with the dissatisfaction expressed by the residents.

A citizen noted that other streets in East Reading are ignored by the City and are not regularly visited by the street sweeper.

Mr. Jones explained that some streets in the City are the responsibility of the State and some are the responsibility of the City. He also explained that the streets on the regular sweeping program (Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays) are those in the downtown and gateway areas. Others are swept when various areas are posted with paper signs and others are swept on Wednesdays.

A citizen inquired about why the odd side of Cotton Street is swept but not the even side. Someone suggested that only the non-parking side of Cotton Street is regularly swept.

Many citizens present noted the need for information about projects like those discussed tonight. They suggested that the City use its website to educate citizens about projects and create a blog where citizens can post questions.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she will work to improve the communication with East Reading residents about projects that affect neighborhoods.

A citizen inquired about when in 2013 the repaving project would occur. Mr. Jones stated that the project will be the first started in spring 2013. Many citizens noted the need for the City to improve its communication about projects. They suggested using the City's website to educate citizens about upcoming projects and creating an area where questions could be posted.

A citizen expressed the belief that the intermediate patch work to Cotton Street is insufficient. Many citizens complained about the longstanding condition of Cotton Street and requested improved information from the City.

Mr. Jones explained that the street cuts are repaired by utility companies. He stated that a temporary patch is installed. After the temporary patch settles, a permanent patch is installed.

There was discussion by citizens about the unfair and unequal treatment of East Reading residents, when compared to other areas of the City.

Renaming of Cotton Street

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she, a police officer and a clergy member met with the mother of the child killed in the hit and run accident on Cotton Street last week. She stated that the meeting allowed the mother to see the need to find an alternative way to memorialize her child.

A citizen suggested that the memorial at the intersection be removed.

A citizen inquired why citizens must separate paper and plastic/metal/glass products when they are co-mingled in the recycling truck. Mr. Jones stated that this temporary situation will be resolved when the new recycling trucks are completed and delivered.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:55 pm. She promised to follow up with residents as the issue with the UGI meters moves forward.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk